

# Telling Spaces: Reading Randolph Stow's Expatriation

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Randolph Stow closes his novel *The Girl Green as Elderflower* (1980)<sup>1</sup> with the protagonist, Crispin Clare, making a toast to Suffolk as a place (173). He is drinking with his aunt-by-marriage, Alicia, whilst minding the local pub. They have the room to themselves, and the toast completes a private moment:

She raised her glass, and Clare chinked his own against it. She looked at him surprised, and he noticed in her eyes, the colour of fine dry sherry, a few flecks of green.

'What is the toast?' she asked.

'I don't know,' he said. 'A general toast. To the place. To seely Suffolk.' (173)

Crispin's line is the last in the book. Leaving aside momentarily the manner in which the story ends unexpectedly on the appreciation of a place, drawing the potency of the setting to the fore in the reader's final impressions of the novel, this scene is also intriguing in the manner it positions and portrays Alicia. Through the description of her eyes, Alicia is aligned here (not for the first time) with Mirabel, the titular girl green as elderflower. Mirabel features in the novel within a tale narrated by Crispin, entitled in both English and Latin: 'Concerning a Boy and a Girl Emerging from the Earth (*De quodam puero et puella de terra emergentibus*)' (139). She represents, in a sense, a conglomerate figure. She is connected through various points of description to the child Amabel, with whom Crispin solicits a spirit (with the shocking claim that it 'is' Crispin) by means of a Ouija-board game. She is also linked with the 'strange' girl in the village (a girl who is never identified, possibly a local, possibly foreign). Her story is also one of three stories-within-the-story that make up 'The Lord Abbot's Tales,' a fictional mythological work with which Crispin amuses himself in his convalescence from both a serious tropical illness, contracted while working in the Trobriand Islands<sup>2</sup>, and a suicide attempt. The three tales share the setting of Suffolk, where Crispin is living, but shift across and interweave different moments in time. While set as medieval, each one draws in characters and activities from the framing narrative of 1961: the first of these three tales, for instance, 'in the time of King Richard' (52), features Crispin's family—his young cousins play a game of Monopoly as it opens, in the same way they had in the framing narrative earlier in the novel. As a whole, the tales represent the most striking example of the manner in which the text plays with time, interweaving different historical moments to destabilise and energise the concept of place presented.

This radical potentiality in the chronotope is also attributed in the novels' final lines to place (rather than character, the usual addressee for toasts). And Stow demands readerly engagement with his setting by his particular use of 'seely' as an adjective. 'Seely' is an archaic (Middle English) word with contradictory meanings. It is defined as signifying something happy and prosperous (significantly in the sense of being 'green'—prosperous and fertile land); lucky; and silly and foolish (*OED*). Usually, the dictionary entry notes, meaning would be determined by context, but here it is left open. In effect, the context actually serves to heighten a contradiction, whereby the concept of happiness and prosperity is a natural association with the act of the toast, while the idea of silliness is emphasised by the myth-versions of the place, the wild flights of fancy they draw in and upon, and the strange energy

they invest in the setting. The toast, through these contradictory connotations, and positioned as it is as the final line of the novel, illustrates the manner in which place and space are fluid concepts in the text. It opens an array of questions as to how this representation of place is telling; what imperative this writing holds specifically for Stow (noting the connections between the narrative and his own life); and what impetus might lie behind writing through this distinctive frame and structure; and finally to how this place is *told*—what the significance of the act of writing in this context might be. Recognising the fluidity of Stow's place-making in the novel opens up possibilities for considering his expatriation as something other than a 'limit point' (Jose 8) between his experiences of Australia and England.

Such a reading of the text, which highlights its speaking to an Australian consciousness despite its overtly English setting, is not unprecedented. In her introductory essay to the new Text Classics edition of the novel, Kerry Goldsworthy suggests that in 'its preoccupation with the complex problems of an emergent postcolonial world, the English roots of first-world antipodeans, the effects of landscape and exile on character and fate, and the otherness of strangers in strange lands, *The Girl Green as Elderflower* is an intensely Australian book' (ix). Melanie Duckworth reads the novel as an example of 'Australian medievalism' (103), and suggests that Stow's use of medieval sources and stories 'enables an opening out of the themes of a search for belonging and the trauma of being lost in time which were raised in his earlier novels' (104). More routinely and broadly, however, discussions on Stow's novels distinguish between the author's Australian writing and his expatriate novels based on their setting and their author's own experiences of expatriation.

Several critics have pointed out that Stow settled in England when he failed to do so anywhere else (see Falkiner, *Mick* 575; Falkiner, 'Pictures, Letters'; Hassall, *Strange Country* 164; Ryan). In his seminal monograph on Stow's work, Anthony Hassall makes a connection between Stow's use of the medieval sources in *The Girl Green as Elderflower* and the sensations of postcolonial alienation, noting the novel's 'victims' are 'displaced from their native surroundings by accident, cruelty or violence' (*Strange Country* 150). Hassall sees this postcolonial layering in the novel as producing a 'friendly haunting,' lending the Suffolk scene 'the complex texture of an old civilisation' (148), and differentiating it from Stow's preceding work: 'This feeling of presence, of warmth, of being surrounded by people is starkly absent from the Australia of Stow's early novels' (149).<sup>3</sup> This claim leads Hassall to suggest that in 'the return "home,"' Stow 'moved further towards reconciliation, and even a hard-won serenity of sorts . . . clearly related to the experience of settling in England' (164). In this way, Hassall suggests, *The Girl Green as Elderflower* serves to mark a particular period in Stow's life, and 'celebrates Suffolk with quiet, abiding pleasure, and without the fierce, nostalgic sense of loss that embitters the celebration of Western Australia [in earlier works]' (147). Nicholas Jose similarly describes Stow's novel *Visitants* (1979) as marking 'a limit point' (8) in Stow's 'complex relationship with Australia as a receding place' (8). Jose also suggests that 'one might read his move to ancestral Stow territory in Essex as a rigorous personal act of undoing colonisation: of returning things to how they might have been' (8–9).

This passage has been much quoted in reviews and public responses to Stow's expatriate writing, including by Goldsworthy in her introduction. While I am persuaded by the concept that Stow's expatriation was connected to his experiences of the colonial, as Jose opens up so beautifully in his essay, I suspect simultaneously that it was not quite this straightforward. The representation of the Suffolk space is both more complex and more sensitive to trauma than Hassall suggests. Critics have tended to conflate the decisiveness of Stow's expatriation and his unwillingness to discuss it publicly with a sense of it as emotionally definitive. Bruce Bennett and Anne Pender describe Stow's settling in England as having 'held promise of a new development as a regional English novelist' (96). Peter Morton, in his study of expatriate writers, describes Stow as a 'perfect example of the immigrant'

(46), someone for whom ‘the question of what it meant to shift the country of domicile . . . rarely held much interest’ (46). Morton, in describing expatriation, compares this category of ‘immigrants’ to the ‘metics,’ ‘those who in some way maintained a relationship with their home country’ (45). In placing Stow in the former category, Morton suggests he was one who ‘melted, for all practical purposes, into British society to the point of obliterating or “forgetting” [his] origins’ (45). But the multiple overt and sub-textual connections to Australia in Stow’s writing from the expatriate perspective demonstrate an active remembering that undermines this concept of his expatriation. Rather than functioning as a dividing line in his writing, the radical temporal structure of *The Girl Green as Elderflower* makes this distinction between Australian ‘past’ and English ‘present’ a difficult one to draw. Andrew Lynch has made a similar argument, reading the medieval in the novel as moving beyond heritage and genealogy. Noting a line of acknowledgement in a manuscript version of *Visitants* that was removed prior to publication and which seems to distinguish Stow’s Australian writing from his expatriate texts—‘This book is *pour prendre congé* [to take leave] of my native land’ (21)—Lynch suggests that in Stow’s writing ‘time, place and belonging are not so easily controlled’ (21). Lynch problematises any idea that Suffolk is a homely space in *The Girl Green as Elderflower*, and that Stow’s genealogical connections to it might be taken to ‘silence four intervening settler generations, in a mood of cultural rejection’ (20). He reads instead the way in which Stow’s ‘increasingly developed medievalist reference complicates the “ancestral” relation to country with many hauntings and temporal displacements’ (21). Rather than separating Stow’s Australian life from his English experience, the expatriate lens infers a perspective which weaves them into relation.

Taking a cue from Lynch, there is the possibility of reading *The Girl Green as Elderflower* in ways beyond the novel’s overt interest in the postcolonial, and themes of loss and trauma. In suggesting that we might examine the nature of Stow’s telling, I am also interested in questioning whether we might engage with the text as directly overlaying and exploring the Australian spaces informing and represented more directly in Stow’s earlier works. As Bruce Clunies Ross suggests, considering his own expatriate reading of Stow’s novels, there can be ‘a peculiar pleasure in discovering this [sense of Australia] from a distance; expatriation can be a way of seeing, and of coming to terms with *patria*’ (90). The structure of *The Girl Green as Elderflower* is based on textual layering; Stow was sensitive to palimpsest in his writing. This reading has the capacity to extend metafictionally through the characterisation of the writing act in the text, marking a relationship between content and form. The shifting chronotope of *The Girl Green as Elderflower* is open-ended, and allows a reading to expand beyond it, particularly as Stow writes from experiences within his own life, a point connecting it to others in his *oeuvre*. Rather than seeing Stow’s expatriate work as distanced and disengaged from Australia, reading the novel in this light highlights an active transnationalism in Stow’s writing. This transnationalism can be understood as central both to the representation of place within the novel, and to the creative practice which generated it: there are several points where the relationship between author and text is as complicated as the place-making within. Tracing this transnationalism means reading Stow’s expatriate perspective as unconstrained by the boundaries of nation in critiquing the global effects of colonisation from the ‘Hub of Empire’ (Morton).

There is, however, an assumption in reading Stow’s representation of place as significant specifically in terms of his life, and in questioning the impetus and imperative behind his writing. This approach suggests inherently a reading that would interrogate not only the conceptualisation of place, but the manner in which author (and characters) are embedded within it, and means seeing the text as a lived place, an act of place-making. Characterisation is a multipart manoeuvre in the novel. The introduction to Crispin is contextualised by his walking through the village of his ancestor’s home, and past a gravestone which bears his own name: ‘Some memory of that stone, accidentally prominent, must have led Major Clare to give his son the same name . . . and to his great-great-great grandson, Swainsteadian visitors at Martlets [his cousins’ house] would say: “Not *Crispin* Clare?”’ (13). As

Goldsworthy notes, there is ‘something uncanny about this, as though the contemporary Clare were a ghostly revenant’ (xi). Stow overtly plays with the potentiality for the ghost narrative in the passage, describing the manner in which the circumstance of the name, coupled with Crispin’s sudden return to his family, leads his youngest cousin Mikey to ‘delight’ in the possibility that he is a vampire: ‘He knew about vampires from television, and toyed with his mysterious cousin, suddenly materialised out of the world at large, like Cleopatra exploring the possibilities of the asp’ (14). Any sense of the Gothic in the passage is in effect alleviated for the reader, in smiling at the child’s fascination. But what does remain is a sense of time doubling and echoing through Crispin as a figure. Goldsworthy likewise draws this conclusion from the moment, suggesting that ‘the gravestone detail is a portal, a miraculous entry into a different kind of time; it’s the first of many moments in the novel when time seems to have collapsed into itself, and the past comes alive in the present’ (xi). While the novel immediately moves away from the moment, there is a powerful circularity enacted in this history. The passage continues on to Crispin’s personal memories of both the village and his cousins’ home. His return to the house emphasises the continued sensation of fluid time in a subtle way, and again sets time in the context of place.

Crispin’s act of writing the place in ‘The Lord Abbot’s Tales’ continues this first uncanny doubling-over of character to actively collapse and condense history across both narrative acts (the tales and the framing narrative) and imbue the setting with a strange timelessness. The recognition of both characters and specific places within the historical context of the tales unsettles even as it amuses. The associations which surround Mikey’s reaction to Crispin’s name on the gravestone in a sense teach us how we might respond to this doubling by ‘exploring the possibilities’ it might afford. The relationship between the two narrative acts is multi-directional. For instance, to return to the close of the novel, Crispin’s recognition of the green in Alicia’s eyes demonstrates the way in which a shifting characterisation is drawn from the tales. Mirabel is an overtly sexualised figure in the tales, who longs for a home, and on both counts the moment between Alicia and Crispin is imbued with an extra layer of significance in aligning Alicia with her. The connection between Alicia and Mirabel is strengthened by the fact that the scene follows immediately from the end of the final tale, telling Mirabel’s story. The tale closes with the green girl, now a white woman, dying in the arms of a priest (yet another character from the framing narrative, the enigmatic Jim-Jacques), who comforts her with the notion that all places and all times are one: ‘For no man is lost, no man goes astray in God’s garden; which is here, which is now, which is tomorrow, which is always, time and time again’ (166). Crispin’s recognition of Alicia’s green eyes coming close after suggests Mirabel’s ‘reincarnation’ in the new moment of the present. Her story expands from the tale to re-emerge and intertwine with Alicia’s (and Amabel’s, and the ‘strange’ girl’s). Arguably, the relation is multivalent. She is not simply drawn from them, but they likewise inherit aspects of her characterisation.

The movement in the final passage of the novel is spatial as well as metaphysical. Echoing the priest’s travel to meet with Mirabel in the tale, Jim-Jacques himself has moved in the novel, returning to America and writing now to Crispin of his life there in ways that echo the symbolism of ‘God’s garden’: ‘surrounded . . . by four hundred acres of woods. The stream is my kitchen and my shower’ (131).<sup>4</sup> The characterisation in the novel is therefore predicated on complex points of interrelation, based in a fluid sense of place and time. But in contrast to these expansive trajectories in the text, the final passage itself is very short. It draws on the moment of the priest’s prayer and Mirabel’s death to enact the fluidity of the myth-space in the ‘real’ world, shifting the revelation of the tale into reference with the lives of Alicia, Crispin and Jim-Jacques. The boundary between the two is blurred by Crispin’s dreaming. As he dozes in the pub before Alicia’s arrival, Mirabel appears to him and talks in the language of Biga-Kiriwina from the Trobriand Islands, where Crispin (and Stow) worked before the illness that brings him to England and opens the novel. This second language has emerged at several moments in the novel, but this is the first instance where it arises not through fever but instead

as something joyous. The language is not translated, allowing the two realities to sit one inside the other and to maintain their own significance and signification, without coalescing. In this moment, Crispin's history enters his present through the structure of a tale that functions as a mythic version of that same present, set in an archaic past.

The layering of the tales over the framing narrative is therefore complex—even more so when considered as a deliberate activity on Crispin's part. The opening line of the novel is an indirect allusion to his intended creative project: 'Quite how to go about doing it Clare could still not see, but the impression was strong with him that the doing would be important, might even be the rebeginning of his health' (7). The writing of the tales which he undertakes is an effort towards his own convalescence, a response to the manner in which he finds himself caught between cultural contexts, between worlds, even. During his fever-episode at Martlets, as he works the Ouija board, he suffers from the traumatic doubling over of self, relative to these different spaces: 'It [the spirit] said its name was Kulisapini. That's my name. It said: "You'll never escape." It said: "I'm still here." It means I died there' (27). The activity he chooses to undertake as a response, translating from Latin and re-writing the tales to incorporate the place and the people around him, can potentially be read not only as translating language and narrative, but as also translating experience into place. The ordering of the tales is not accidental. The first tale is concerned with a lost child, the second with a lost man, and the third with a lost child, who grows into an adulthood marked by connotations of fertility and 'seely' (green) health, even while she is still positioned as other through 'her asocial strangeness, her aura of displacement' (Lynch 28). Within the text, then, the tales layer the context and associations of Crispin's illness and continued recovery over both his lived experience in Suffolk as a place and his reading of much older invocations of the same setting. The effect is to create a complex textual space which utilises temporal fluidity to speak to all three.

To extend this complexity even further, reading the tales metafictionally (simply in seeing them as texts-within-the-text) reminds us that this act of constructing narrative is Stow's as much as it is Crispin's. Hassall notes that the novel is notable as 'the first in which Stow has a writer as protagonist, and we are given some insight into the complex process by which his personal experience and his reading are blended and transformed' (*Strange Country* 152). But this blending and transforming is also made overt in that it is reduplicated. The author's creative practice read over the characterisation of Crispin as narrator adds yet another point of layering to the textual effect. Crispin's act of translating, for instance, is also Stow's—the 'Author's Note' on the text includes a list of his references and sources for the tales, while Stow's original translations of the tales from the Latin, written by Ralph of Coggeshall and William of Newburgh, are added as an appendix, something Stow fought his publishers to have included (Falkiner, *Mick* 601). Deep connections in language between Stow's life and that of his protagonist are validated in an immediate sense by the inclusion of the Biga-Kiriwina in the text, drawn from Stow's knowledge of the language. Suzanne Falkiner, discussing the writing of her rich biography of Stow, has suggested:

The major discovery I made in tracing Stow's life was that nearly all his works became much more accessible when contextualised by the events of his life, and that all his work tended to be based on his own acute observations and memories of the real world. He did not like people to read symbolic or allegorical meanings into his work: questions about literary influences and theory irritated him. ('Randolph Stow')

To say simply that Stow was exploring his own experiences in his creative practice does not quite encapsulate the complexity of all this layering of narrative in the text. There is certainly

autobiographical influence, but there is also a deeper sense that this is an exploration, in part, of the various ways in which self might be rendered in (mutable) relation with time and place.

Stow's life has a general relevance to *The Girl Green as Elderflower*, beyond the specificity of language-acts. Like Stow, Crispin describes having studied in Western Australia, having moved several times across countries, and serving in a governmental position on the Trobriand Islands (Falkiner, *Mick* 86–313).<sup>5</sup> Here Stow was overcome by illness (possibly a form of malaria, undiagnosed, like that from which Crispin suffers), and attempted suicide, an event echoed in Crispin's history (94–95). He was returned to Australia, collected in Sydney by his mother and sister, and went home to Geraldton to recover (Falkiner, *Mick* 314–15). From Western Australia, Stow moved to England. Exploring the country, he visited Hadleigh, 'the ancestral village of the Stow family' (Stow in Falkiner, *Mick* 323). In her biography, Falkiner connects this time in Hadleigh with Crispin's reunion with his family in returning to Swainstead in the novel (*Mick* 579).<sup>6</sup> But Falkiner also describes this move as enabling Stow's return to writing. 'After his repatriation to Australia, Stow experienced his first severe writing block, finally broken during his first sojourn in Suffolk in England . . . This psychological watershed led to the *Outrider* suite of poems—which he called his 'fever poems'—and much later, of course, to *Visitants* and *The Girl Green as Elderflower*' (Falkiner, 'Pictures, Letters' np). It is a version of Stow's poem 'Outrider' that forms the epigraph for *The Girl Green as Elderflower*, connecting the works in a vague lineage. Duckworth suggests that "'Outrider" provides a concise example of the way in which trauma disrupts temporality in Stow's writing. The poem dramatises a moment of existing between two worlds, looking forward and looking back' (108). She likewise sees Crispin's cottage in the description of the 'dim low English room' (3) of the first stanza, while Falkiner interprets it as only connecting to the cottage, but also referring to Stow's Geraldton childhood, 'while appending a deft reference to the ominous tropical reefs of his New Guinea breakdown' (*Mick* 597). Through these connections, Crispin's act of writing in his recovery is an echo of Stow's own, layering place and time. Stow produces in the work a translation not only of language but also of experience, in the same way Crispin reproduces and translates those same experiences over again in the tales. Stow himself suggested in an interview that the tales interested him in their 'resonance': 'I want to ring bells in people's minds, to make them relate to their own experience, to say it *is* like that, yes, I remember . . .' (Hassall 320).

Crispin's writing in this space, moreover, is recognisable in other ways. Various portraits we have of Stow, both from within his papers held in the National Library and in publications such as Graeme Kinross-Smith's photo essay ('Randolph Stow'), show him as positioned in the context of his writing. Picture One in Kinross-Smith's essay, for example, is captioned 'Stow at the typewriter at Dairy Farm Cottages, East Bergholt village, Suffolk' (1). Stow produced a self-portrait in 1957 that he entitled 'Self at Home,' in which he is seated pensively at his desk (Falkiner, *Mick* 442). In each, there is an awareness of Stow-as-writer embedded in the specificity of the moment. Writing is documented as an act, connected to place. (Another of Kinross-Smith's photos shows Stow walking up the hill and out of the cottage, the red-brick, the roof and the chimney visible behind him (Ryan, 'Uncovering')). This highlighting of place is echoed in the textual construction of Crispin-as-writer in *The Girl Green as Elderflower* within the specificity of his cottage, Hole Farm. There are several descriptions of Hole Farm in the novel which suggest that Stow drew from one of his own homes in Suffolk to imagine this particular place. Falkiner has also published an image from Stow's photographs of 'Fishpond cottage, Vale Farm, east Bergholt, where I lived from 1969–1973' (*Mick* 422)—a modest red-brick cottage, with a peaked roof and a tall central chimney, set into the side of a hill, in open farmland. And early in the novel, Crispin's home is described in similar terms:

At the top of the hill he turned, breathing deep and white, and looked back, down the pits of blue shadow which were his footprints, to the smoking cottage at the

heart of the curved waste of white and grey. All the light in the landscape was drawn to its red bricks. Modest as it was, it imposed by its colour, seeming to tower. Except for the hedgerows, it was the only sign of man. (12)

Stow worked on *Visitants* while living at Fishpond Cottage. That he drew directly from his time in Suffolk for *The Girl Green as Elderflower* is documented in an interview conducted by Anthony Hassall, in which Stow describes the collection of chronicles, voices, dialect and stories from the area that shaped the writing (319–20). The cottage, as Falkiner describes it, was ‘spartan and dark, crowded with old furniture, and—sited as it was in a shady hollow—extremely cold in winter’ (*Mick* 507).<sup>7</sup> While living there, Stow ‘had begun to work as an unpaid barman’ (521), helping himself to drinks for his service, in the same way Crispin does in the novel. He also became addicted to the sedative Mandrax, which brought on agitation and nightmares and forced him ‘to put aside the writing of *Visitants* because the memories were too disturbing’ (519). This experience perhaps informs the narrative description of Crispin’s fever-episodes in his cottage; it is easy to imagine the fictional space as overlaying the real, and the act of writing in that place as bridging the two realities.<sup>8</sup>

Stow’s contemplation of personal experience in writing (and of writing) is clear. But the effect of these influences for the reader is that they enhance the fluidity and instability of place. The sensation is one of layered realities and worlds. But Crispin’s history of global movement extends beyond Stow’s own, in a way that directly references the colonial Empire. Early in the novel, he describes his life to Jim-Jacques in a session at the bar, directly associating his use of the word ‘colonial’ (in the sense of his governmental work) with his family history:

I was born in South Africa, of a New Zealand mother and a father born in India. My mother and I sat out the war in New Zealand. After that, my father was in Malaya, and I went to boarding school in Australia. Then he was in Kenya, and I went to school in Devon. The end of the Empire was pretty confusing to families like mine. (43)

A transnational reading of the novel is invited by the movement of this passage, informing our response to the themes and sensations of the tales. But this passage is followed shortly after by another scene invoking global movement, a recollection of a specifically Australian space triggered by the English countryside:

They walked by a line of poplars, whose translucent new leaves overhead glowed auburn. Across a field of young beans were the outbuildings of a substantial farm, and the patterned brickwork of their walls stirred a memory in Clare, until he remembered his prep-school days in Western Australia, where the early settlers seemed to have a passion for such games with bricks, which he thought he had heard called diapering.

... The trees below would later darken and have, in the humid summer air, a tinge of blue, almost black. But now all was softest green and silver, except where, far off, there flared the chrome yellow of a mustard field. Between the willows, the distant river meandered towards the next village, whose high church tower was flying a huge flag, a vermillion cross on white. ‘St George’s Day,’ Clare realised. ‘Happy birthday, Shakespeare.’ (88–89)

A history of studying in Western Australia is of course shared by both Stow and Crispin. It is another instance wherein fiction and reality are overlapping, and the direct point of reference in the memory

allows the connection. But there are a few more subtle points of reference in the scene that might also be read as indirectly drawing from Western Australian spaces. The buildings of both Guildford Grammar (where Stow attended school) and St George's College (where he was resident during his studies at the University of Western Australia) feature red brick and diapering, and their grounds have English trees—poplars and willows in Guildford. St George's College flies a large flag, St George's Cross, from the tower beside its chapel and it is probable given the age and traditions of the College that this was also true in Stow's time. Both places are in sight of the Swan River, and at Guildford, the red brick church is not far from its meandering banks. Both places might have been drawn from, consciously or subconsciously, in this scene.

Moreover, the reference to diapering—an architectural tradition which emerged in England in the late fifteenth century (Gurling 29) and was transported to Australia with colonial settlement—once again draws a connection between the Australian and English space. Several of the buildings around the campus of the University of Western Australia—residential houses in Nedlands, churches, even the nearby Old Swan Brewery—are of the same style and brick, and speak to a desire to emulate English traditions. Crispin therefore sees in the English space a resonance with an Australian space that in turn was actively attempting to cultivate the same connection. Even the colours in the passage which follow emphasise this entanglement of scene. The blue-black and silver-green of the foliage resonates with descriptions of Australian flora, and the sight of crops in the distance would have been a familiar one for Stow from his upbringing in the Western Australian wheatbelt. The landscape thus opens from the specificity of the connection signalled by the brickwork to a kind of translucence of general reference. But significantly, in coming to focus on the church and the flag, the scene for Crispin turns once again to writing—'Happy birthday, Shakespeare.' The allusion re-emphasises a writerly involvement in place, as the traditional celebration of Shakespeare's birthday on England's national day (his actual birth date is unknown) sees the importance of the writer subsumed by the importance of the day for the nation in and of itself.

These connections between writing and place—or perhaps writing as an act embedded in place—ties alternate spaces and scenes within the one setting in the novel. The connection between the reality of Stow's life and its representation in Crispin's story is mimicked by the manner in which Crispin's experiences as narrator seep into his creation of the tales, overlaying times and places, confusing and making complex the textual space that holds them together. Despite the shifts in characterisation and in time, the setting of the novel in Suffolk is the one thing that remains constant. But simultaneously, it is opened to a rich layering of memories and connections which expand outwards from Suffolk to encompass Australia and the colonial Empire. It is this writing of place, holding fluidity as a feature inherent to the textual construction, which is seen as offering Crispin a means of recovering the self. This is a form of place-making which has a capacity for transcending the logic of nation through the connections it enables. The relationship between physical space and nation is rendered mutable. The writing is telling in this wider sense as well, pointing to an anxiety of nationhood in extending beyond a purely English past. Crispin's colonial history as described in the conversation at the pub would seem to configure the places referenced in direct relation to the Empire. But the relationship between Australian and English spaces created in the movements of the text works to dissolve the set relation between past and present, and simultaneously open English spaces to the influence of the colonial world. Colonial history is acknowledged—Crispin is still under its sway, as the fever episode at the Ouija board suggests—but not seen as determined or closed. Instead, it returns to the Empire, continuing and irrupting into Crispin's English life. The periphery and the centre are folded together, and any hierarchy between them is destabilised.

Crispin's need for a space of recovery, then, might extend past physical and mental illness, to encompass an emotional inability to face colonial history and the concept of (Australian) nationality



within it. The English space does not erase or expunge the trauma of his work in the colonial field but contextualises it within a longer and larger history. In this setting, Crispin can allow himself to act as witness to this trauma, in the same way he can witness the Alsatian's devouring of the cock-pheasant (68). That Stow was anxious about Australia's colonial history (and the 'post'-colonial present) is well attested. Falkiner raises the possibility that the Forrest River Mission illustrated to Stow the hypocrisy of colonial history in its dealings with the Indigenous people (*Mick* 155–57, 181–82). She recognises that shortly after leaving Oombulgurri, Stow wrote two poems: 'In the first, "Black Jack's Doppelganger," the writer in a dream-state claims brotherhood with a long-dead Aboriginal man, by virtue of sharing the same landscape from childhood—an early attempt, perhaps, to articulate Stow's present conflict about his family's usurping colonial presence' (*Mick* 168). She also cites a letter Stow wrote in 1986, of his departure from Forrest River: 'When the time came for me to leave and take a humble teaching job . . . I felt a deep sense of loss. It seemed that I had been privileged to feel for a while, vicariously, rooted in my native land as no white man can be, in fact' (172). In his constant movement, Stow becomes a wanderer. In 1998, he would write of a night drinking with an Aboriginal stockman while en route to Adelaide in 1957: 'When I was twenty-one, a drover whom I was drinking with at Tennant Creek summed me up pretty well. "You're one of my mob," he said: "never tie up with no one"' (*Mick* 173). That Stow remembered this incident as worth mentioning across the distance of 40 years, and as something descriptive of his nature, suggests a certain pride in it as a representation of self. At the same time, this connection to Indigenous culture is consistently framed through a context of colonial anxiety, as in the letter of 1986, suggesting he also potentially felt conflicted by the colonial experience.

This awareness of positionality within the colonial scene suggests that reading Stow's expatriate novels as separate from his Australian work could be reductive. Hassall's argument that the healing within *The Girl Green as Elderflower* is based within the 'homeliness' of the English space, or Stow's sense of 'reconciliation' (*Strange Country* 164) undermines Stow's sensitivity to Indigenous autonomy. Hassall closes his chapter on the novel by arguing that 'Clare is able to recover in Suffolk because he finds there what he has lacked, an identity, a role and a culture' (163). But this reading elides the text's awareness of the victims of the colonial endeavour. The idea that the trauma of colonisation can be undone this easily is not quite reconcilable with the sophistication of Stow's literary responses to the impact of colonial forces across time. In writing the English scene, in writing from his expatriation, Stow is undoing the container of nation. *The Girl Green as Elderflower* approaches the postcolonial dilemma by affording Australian spaces the capacity and agency to be felt in another setting. In this, Stow is allowing the possibility of exploring the mixed emotions of his connection with both places. The novel is perhaps most interesting when read as neither English nor Australian, but as an expatriate work, involved more universally in the global, human experience of postcolonial trauma. But at the same time, it functions on this level without sacrificing its interest in place-making. The ending of the novel, to circle around to it once again, is unexpected in the manner in which it foregrounds place as the closing concern, denying the narrative satisfaction of a resolution for the characters. It is the natural world, not the human or cultured world, which offers the optimism of the final scene. As readers, we are invested in Crispin's recovery, but all we are offered as conclusive in this sense is that he has accepted work, without seemingly enormous enthusiasm, and that he will return to visit the family. Instead, the inference at the close is that his ability to appreciate the place's natural vitality is what will allow his continued health. It is literally an interest and a glorying in life. Read like this, the toast expands into a beautiful moment. A sense of infinite potentiality in the natural space extends through it outwards across physical and temporal worlds of the tales, to draw everything back into the one adjective—'seely' place, the green place, the prosperous place, or rather the sense of place as offering the possibility of prospering.

To suggest that place was also cathartic for Stow is really only to surmise what the act of writing place in this way might have offered him, consciously or subconsciously. But this conjecture is based in the clear influence of Stow's life on his writing, and the tensions that simmered in his experience of the world as documented in Falkiner's biography. And regardless of whether or not Stow's creative practice offered him such an engagement with place and nation, his representation of place in *The Girl Green as Elderflower* demonstrates a fluidity that is potent and powerful in effect. Characterised by a complex time and a fragmented narrative construction, Suffolk in its specificity as a place is laid open to the transnational. Different scenes within the text enact and allow for the imaginary contact of both real and abstract spaces, extending beyond England to Australia, Papua New Guinea and America in a reflection of Stow's own expatriate trajectories of movement. The layering of place over place draws the textual world over the real world, and offers strange possibilities for the ways in which we might know and relate to Australia as a nation. These are possibilities that are fluid and dynamic, capable of encompassing a broader global perspective, and from which we might redefine our relation as postcolonial selves to national boundaries.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Given the relevance of the introduction of this issue to my argument, all page references to *The Girl Green as Elderflower* are drawn from the Text Classics Edition (2015).

<sup>2</sup> While the islands are not explicitly identified in the novel, the location is made clear through the use of Biga-Kiriwina throughout and in context with Stow's own history.

<sup>3</sup> There is a serious erasure of Indigenous people in this representation of Australia as empty, which Hassall suggests but does not discuss openly, and then ironically carries over into his own assessment of contemporary Australia: 'This loneliness in the face of the silent bush and the seemingly empty continent ran as a major theme through much of Australian literature . . . And the people of Australia, the most urbanized on earth, still congregate in coastal cities, seeking relief in propinquity from the emptiness of the interior of their country.' (*Strange Country* 149)

<sup>4</sup> It is worth noting that Stow too travelled to America in 1965, and Falkiner draws a connection between Jim-Jacques's description of the place and his time at Lone Mountain Lodge—a picture of which in her biography shows an appropriately wild setting, and a stream in the foreground (*Mick* 443). This could be potentially a fourth location drawn from Stow's travels around the globe which emerges and is overlaid in the text, alongside the Suffolk landscape of his home Fishpond Cottage, the references to his experiences in New Guinea and his memories of Western Australia.

<sup>5</sup> More specifically, after finishing his undergraduate degree at the University of Western Australia, where he published his first novel and served as an editor of *Westerly* Magazine, Stow took up a position at Oombulgurri (Forrest River Mission). It was an experience that informed the writing of *To the Islands* (1958). From there, he took up a teaching position in Literature at the University of Adelaide, before shifting to the University of Sydney to study Anthropology. Dropping out of that course after a suicide attempt, he returned home to Western Australia, where he took a position under the Department of Territories as a Cadet Patrol Officer on the Trobriand Islands.

<sup>6</sup> Interestingly, Falkiner also notes the manner in which Stow, like Crispin, finds the grave of an ancestor—'a little boy called Thomas Quinton Stow' (*Mick* 323)—who shares a name with the Stow who first moved to Australia, a replication akin to Crispin walking past the gravestone which shows he shares his own ancestor's name. Stow's grandmother's home in Geraldton was also named 'Hadleigh' (3).

<sup>7</sup> Falkiner documents the connection of the name 'Hole Farm' used in the novel to the boyhood home of Stow's great-great-grandfather, 'Kersey Hole Farm' (*Mick* 507), a connection reminiscent of the layering of Crispin's name in the graveyard of the village within the novel.

<sup>8</sup> Fishpond Cottage is not the only example of this real-world space being recreated in the text—see note two above, and the connection to Lone Mountain Lodge.

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